



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Updated Return on Investment for Preparedness to Respond study Highlights

WFP operates in a humanitarian environment characterised by more frequent, more intense, and longer-lasting crises, with more people affected and resources increasingly constrained. Country Offices are under constant pressure to respond faster, reach further, and do more with less. In this context, emergency preparedness is no longer optional; it is a core determinant of response effectiveness.

Preparedness refers to pre-shock investments that enable WFP and its partners to respond faster, more efficiently and at lower cost, while improving outcomes for affected populations. It covers physical assets and stockpiles, as well as systems, data, skills, coordination, and anticipatory action.

This study updates and strengthens WFP's methodology for measuring the return on investment (ROI) of preparedness interventions. It provides evidence-based insights into the scale and range of benefits generated by preparedness, responding to information needs expressed by

Country Offices, management and donors. The analysis covers 19 preparedness activities across six investment categories, drawing on both country-level and global case studies.

The methodology builds on approaches developed in interagency ROI studies (2015, 2017) and has been adapted to reflect WFP's operational context. It captures cost and time savings alongside impacts on human well-being, and on economic and social outcomes¹.

The findings are clear and consistent: preparedness investments deliver strong financial, operational, and humanitarian returns beyond time and cost savings alone, with **every dollar invested saving US\$3.40 in response costs and reducing emergency response lead times by 25 days.**

The study was jointly developed by WFP's Emergency Preparedness and Response Service (PRGE), Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service (PRGF) and Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) within the Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch (TECF).

¹ Given data availability and the nature of each investment, not all impact dimensions were assessed for every case.

Strong financial returns and time savings

The analysis shows that the preparedness activities examined in this study deliver a financial ROI of US\$3.4², representing an increase compared to previous studies³. Across every case study where cost savings were quantified, returns exceeded the initial investment.

Moreover, preparedness reduces emergency response lead times by an average of 25 days. The largest time savings were observed through global and regional pre-positioning mechanisms (100 days), local pre-positioning of food (65 days) and Anticipatory Action interventions (59 days).

These time and cost savings are not only operational efficiencies; they translate into earlier assistance, reduced suffering, and stronger protection of lives and livelihoods. The qualitative review also highlights wider benefits: across all investment categories, scores indicate strong gains in human well-being (2.3), as well as in the economic (2.2) and social (1.9) dimensions⁴.

Preparedness strengthens food security and nutrition, helps sustain livelihoods, stabilises markets, builds trust, reduces displacement, improves gender dynamics, and reinforces community resilience.

Country-level investments deliver broad benefits

For country-level investments, results are aggregated at investment-category level. The different investments have distinct impacts:



Infrastructure: investments in Humanitarian Staging Areas (HSAs) and road rehabilitation yield strong financial returns (average ROI: 2.0) and reduce emergency response lead times. Infrastructure also improves human well-being (2.3) and economic outcomes (2.3), and supports access to remote areas for commerce. Road construction promotes trust, peacebuilding, safer mobility for women, children, and people with disabilities, fostering inclusive access to services (social score: 2.1).



Pre-positioning: Pre-positioning food and non-food items ahead of disasters is more cost-effective and faster than emergency procurement, with a financial ROI of 1.3.



Staff and learning: While cost savings were not calculated for this category, the operational benefits are substantial. Simulations, rosters, and short-term staff availability can enable responses up to 14 days faster, strengthen decision-making under pressure, reduce the risk of response gaps, and improve coordination across sectors during crises.



Data and systems: Data readiness is among the highest-return preparedness investments, with a financial ROI of 3.7, reflecting the high-quality data systems WFP develops to forecast emergencies. These technological advances generate

² These figures are conservative, as the methodology does not yet account for conflict risk or the increasing frequency of disasters linked to climate change, both of which could further increase the expected benefits of preparedness.

³ UNICEF and WFP (2015) reported an average ROI of 2.1 across interventions, with a time gain of 10 days. Similar findings emerged from the Inter-agency ROI study (OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017), which reported an average return of 2.6 for every dollar invested and an average time saving of 14 days.

⁴ Interventions were assessed using a standardized three-point scale, where 1 indicates low impact, 2 medium impact, 3 strong impact.

strong returns and enable timely decision-making. Average time savings are 14 days. Examples include famine early warning systems and the operational use of nutrition data, which help households avoid negative coping strategies and stabilise local markets during shocks.



Technical assistance to government: This category delivered a financial ROI of 2.3 and time savings of five days per emergency, alongside substantial qualitative benefits, particularly in the economic and social dimensions. Examples include WFP support for the development and implementation of government mechanised packing systems and commodity tracking systems. Such government-led preparedness

investments can stabilise local markets, protect smallholder incomes, strengthen national leadership and ownership, and reinforce trust between WFP and national counterparts.



Anticipatory action interventions: This category delivered some of the largest and fastest returns, with a financial ROI of 3.5 and time savings of 59 days per emergency. Strong human well-being and economic impacts are achieved through early cash assistance. By linking early warning triggers to pre-arranged financing, WFP can release funds within minutes rather than months, enabling households to protect food security, livelihoods, and assets before shocks hit.

Global investments generate strong benefits at scale

- **The Self-Registration Application (SRA)** streamlines beneficiary registration through digital processes, saving time and reducing duplication. Rolled out in eight countries, it has registered more than 14 million beneficiaries and delivers savings of US\$11.5 per household, with a financial ROI of US\$19. WFP's global investment was approximately US\$850,000. Centralised development enabled rapid country-level deployment, reducing response times by 19 days during emergencies.
- **The Rapid Start Emergency Training**, launched in 2022, is WFP's core emergency training for newcomers and surge staff. It covers foundational emergency concepts, coordination roles, data essentials, and practical scenarios. More than 400 staff from nearly 50 Country Offices have participated, strengthening preparedness and reducing response delays. The programme has an estimated ROI of 10: every US\$1 invested saves roughly US\$10 in response costs.
- **The Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF)** manages global food procurement and positioning through a centralised system that combines market monitoring, price analysis, and demand forecasting. This enables more strategic supply chain decisions across countries and can

make commodities available up to 100 days earlier than traditional models, based on deliveries in 38 countries.

- **Maintaining surge capacity for nutrition staff** supports faster deployments and reduces delivery timelines. Evidence from emergencies in seven countries indicates average time savings of 43 days per response when nutrition surge staff are deployed.
- **Pre-positioning specialised nutritious foods** regionally and globally improves response times and is associated with improved human well-being (score: 3.0) by reducing malnutrition risks among children. In the social domain (score: 2.0), it also reduces displacement risk by enabling treatment closer to home.
- **Use of nutrition data for operations** generates significant benefits. In South Sudan, early interventions helped prevent deterioration in children's nutrition status. In Gaza and Myanmar, integrating nutrition indicators strengthened IPC analysis and supported advocacy. Economically, this approach reduced data collection costs compared with standalone SMART surveys. Socially, it enabled more transparent, targeted support for those most in need.

Systemic, sustained investments drive increased benefit

Preparedness investments deliver strong and growing returns. This study finds that WFP preparedness investments consistently generate strong returns. Across the activities analysed, the average financial ROI was 3.4—higher than in previous studies—while response times were reduced by an average of 25 days, indicating increasing efficiency and impact.

Preparedness gains come from a systemic approach across WFP. Progress in logistics, human resources, early warning, and anticipatory action—combined with high-impact global investments—has strengthened WFP’s readiness. These results reflect an integrated approach in which each investment contributes to response capacity and, collectively, delivers cumulative impact.

Preparedness benefits extend beyond cost and time savings. Alongside financial and operational gains, preparedness investments deliver clear humanitarian outcomes and wider economic and social benefits. They help prevent malnutrition, protect livelihoods, stabilize markets, and strengthen social cohesion. Technical assistance to governments can also generate benefits such as more stable local markets, improved protection of smallholder incomes, and stronger national leadership.

Global preparedness investments generate outsized benefits at scale. By leveraging

economies of scale, these investments can deliver substantial time and cost savings, with benefits amplified across multiple operations and contexts.

Supply chain preparedness accelerates procurement and delivery of assistance.

Investments such as HSAs, pre-positioning, global commodity management, and digital systems can significantly shorten procurement and delivery timelines—reducing lead times by up to 100 days—and decrease reliance on costly last-minute logistics. These measures strengthen end-to-end supply chain resilience, helping ensure that food and nutrition assistance is available when and where needs emerge, even in hard-to-reach or disrupted environments.

Data and technology-driven preparedness delivers the strongest returns.

Early warning systems, self-registration technology, and Anticipatory Action show the strongest ROIs and the largest operational gains, reinforcing technology as a central pillar of WFP’s preparedness strategy.

Sustained investment in preparedness drives meaningful progress.

Continued investment in WFP’s preparedness portfolio has contributed to significant time and cost savings in recent years. These findings are consistent with the evaluation of WFP’s Emergency Preparedness Policy (2017), which highlights that sustained, layered investments underpin meaningful progress.

Read the [Full Report](#) and [Annexes](#).

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